

## I BEEN WORKING ON THE RAILROAD ....

the Great Editor said he wanted to meet me  
in person before he published my book.  
he said most writers were sons of bitches  
and that he just didn't want to print anybody  
who was  
so since he paid the train fare  
I went on down there to  
New Orleans  
where I lived around the corner from him  
in a small room.

the Great Editor lived in a cellar with a  
printing press, his wife and two  
dogs.  
the Great Editor also published a famous  
literary magazine  
but my projected book  
would be his first try at  
that.  
he survived on the magazine, on luck, on  
handouts.

each night I ate dinner with the Great  
Editor and his wife (my only meal and  
probably theirs too).  
then we'd drink beer until midnight  
when I'd go to my small room  
open a bottle of wine and begin  
typing.  
he said he didn't have enough  
poems.  
"I need more poems," he said.

he had caught up on my back poems  
and as I wrote the new poems he  
printed them.  
I was writing directly into the  
press.

around noon each day I'd go around  
the corner  
knock on the window  
and see the Great Editor  
feeding pages of my poems  
into the press.

the Great Editor was also the Great  
Publisher, the Great Printer and a  
many Great Number of Other Things,  
and I was practically the unknown



poet so it was all quite  
strange.

anyhow, I would wave the pages at  
him and he would stop the press  
and let me in.

he'd sit and read the poems:

"hmmm ... good ... why don't you  
come to dinner tonight?"  
then I'd leave.

some noons I'd knock on the  
window  
without any poems  
and the Great Editor would stare  
at me as if I were a  
giant roach.  
he wouldn't open the door.

"GO AWAY!" I could hear him scream  
through the window, "GO AWAY AND  
DON'T COME BACK UNTIL YOU HAVE  
SOME POEMS!"

he would be genuinely angry  
and it puzzled me: he expected  
4 or 5 poems from me  
each day.

I'd stop somewhere for a couple of  
six-packs  
go back to my room  
and begin to type.  
the afternoon beer always tasted  
good and I'd come up with  
some poems ...

take them back  
knock on the window  
wave the pages.

the Great Editor would smile  
pleasantly  
open the door  
take the pages  
sit down and read them:  
"umm ... ummm ... these are  
good ... why don't you drop by  
for dinner tonight?"

and in between the afternoon  
and the evening



I'd go back to my room  
and sign more and more  
colophons.  
the pages were thick, heavily  
grained, expensive  
designed to last  
2,000 years.  
the signings were slow and  
laborious  
written out with a special  
pen ...  
thousands of colophons  
and as I got drunker  
to keep from going  
altogether crazy  
I began making drawings  
and  
statements ...  
when I finished signing the  
colos  
the stack of pages stood  
six feet tall  
in the center of the  
room.

as I said,  
it was a very strange time  
for an unknown writer.  
he said it to me one  
night:  
"Chinaski, you've ruined  
poetry for me ... since I've  
read you I just can't read  
anything else ...."

high praise, indeed, but I  
knew what he meant.

each day his wife stood  
on the street corners  
trying to sell paintings,  
her paintings and the paintings  
of other painters.  
she was a beautiful and  
fiery woman.

finally, the book was done.  
that is, except for the binding;  
the Great Editor couldn't do  
the binding, he had to pay for  
the binding part and that  
pissed him.



but our job was done,  
his and mine,  
and the Great Editor and  
his wife put me on the train  
back to L.A.

both of them standing there  
on the platform  
looking at me and smiling  
as I looked back from my  
seat by the window.  
it was ...  
embarrassing ....

finally the train started  
to slowly roll  
and I waved and they  
waved  
and then as I was  
nearly out of sight  
the Great Editor  
jumped up and down  
like a little boy,  
still waving .....

I walked back to the bar  
car and decided to stay  
my trip  
there.

it was some stops and  
some hours later  
when the porter came  
back there:  
"HENRY CHINASKI! IS THERE  
A HENRY CHINASKI HERE?"

"here my good man,"  
I said.

"damn, man," he said, "I've  
been looking all over this  
train for you!"

I tipped him and opened the  
telegram:  
"YOU'RE STILL A S.O.B. BUT  
WE STILL LOVE YOU ...  
Jon and Louise ...."

I motioned the porter over  
ordered a double scotch  
on the rocks



then I had it  
and I held it up a moment  
toasted them an almost  
lyrical blessing  
then drank it down  
as the train  
rolled and swayed  
swayed and rolled  
working me further and further  
away  
from those magic  
people.

#### BRIGHT BOY

we were in one of those after-hour places.  
I don't know how long we had been there.  
I noticed a dead cigar in my hand, attempted  
to light it, burned my nose ...

"you never met Randy Newhall?" the guy  
next to me asked.

"naw ...."

"he got through college in 2 years instead  
of 4 ..."

I got the barkeep to bring us a couple more  
drinks.

"... he walked into the largest agency in the  
world, they had 3,000 applications for this  
one open position but he didn't fill one  
out, he just talked to management for 15  
minutes and he was hired ..."

"... uh ...."

"he began in the mailroom and in 6 months he  
was arranging package deals for tv programs  
and the movies ...  
nobody ever got out of the mailroom that  
fast, and next he married an intelligent girl  
just out of law school..."

"yeah?"

"in his office he seemed to spend most of his  
time putting his golf balls across the room.  
he made work look easy ..."